

# Americans for Democratic Action



*A Newsletter for Liberal Activists*

**ADA TODAY**

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## ADA ENDORSES SENATOR BARACK OBAMA FOR PRESIDENT



Amy Isaacs with Senator Obama

Americans for Democratic Action convention delegates enthusiastically endorsed Sen. Barack Obama for President. Given the paramount importance of the 2008 presidential race and the clear contrast between the presumptive nominees of the two parties, it should come as no surprise that the vote was unanimous.

ADA National Director Amy Isaacs hailed the endorsement, saying Obama “offers responsible and compassionate

leadership that is inclusive of all our country’s citizens.” Similar sentiments were widely expressed by delegates who praised Obama for his priorities for Iraq, healthcare, global warming, and numerous other areas of concern to liberals.

While ADA members supported many candidates during the primary season, the overwhelming sense at the convention was that it is time to unite behind our standard-bearer and give him our full support. This sentiment was bolstered by Sen. Hillary Clinton’s endorsement of the presumptive Democratic nominee on June 7th. The differences between the Democratic contenders are slight when compared to the dramatically diverging vision for America offered by Senator McCain, the Republican nominee.

McCain offers more of the same failed policies that have characterized the Bush Administration’s approach to America and the world. He wants to continue Bush’s

quest to privatize Social Security, calling the most successful government program in the last century “an absolute disgrace” at a campaign event. His campaign team has no understanding of the economic situation and even less sympathy for the difficulties facing working Americans. Former Sen. Phil Gramm, McCain’s chief economic advisor, said America is a “nation of whiners” and that we are experiencing only a “mental recession.”

The United States simply cannot afford four more years of Republican governance. Democrats are fortunate to have a credible, dynamic, and strongly liberal (90% lifetime ADA rating) nominee to offer our country instead. ADA will work tirelessly over the coming months to make sure that we can look forward to a President we can take pride in. If you would like to support these efforts, donate to the ADA Liberal Victory Fund by sending a check to 1625 K Street, NW, Suite 210 Washington, DC 20006.

## MAJOR CHANGES ADOPTED AT 2008 ADA CONVENTION

The 2008 ADA national convention held in Washington, DC was much more than a membership meeting. It was both a celebration of ADA’s years of liberal activism and a reminder of all that still needs to be done.

The convention began June 12th when delegates gathered in Policy Commissions to review ADA policies. A substantial change in the way policy commissions work was adopted this year so that, instead of spending time drafting and editing statements, the commissions worked to identify the most pressing issues in their area. The results will become the ADA Action Agenda for the 2009 legislative season. In addition

to guiding ADA’s lobbying efforts, the agenda will be submitted to Congressional Leadership and, hopefully, the new Obama Administration in an effort to make ADA’s liberal policies a part of their priorities.

Another change requires that, rather than waiting until membership conventions, ADA policy commissions work year-round to keep existing ADA policies updated and to draft timely responses to new issues.

Delegates to the convention turned to more celebratory activities Thursday evening as ADA awarded former Representative

Patricia Schroeder (D-CO) the Winn Newman Lifetime Achievement Award. Representative Schroeder’s hilarious acceptance speech received a standing ovation. Later that evening ADA’s Workers’ Rights Committee awarded Communications Workers of America’s Secretary Treasurer, Barbara Easterling, the Reuther Chavez Award for her years of dedication to working Americans. ADA’s outgoing president, (continued on page 4)

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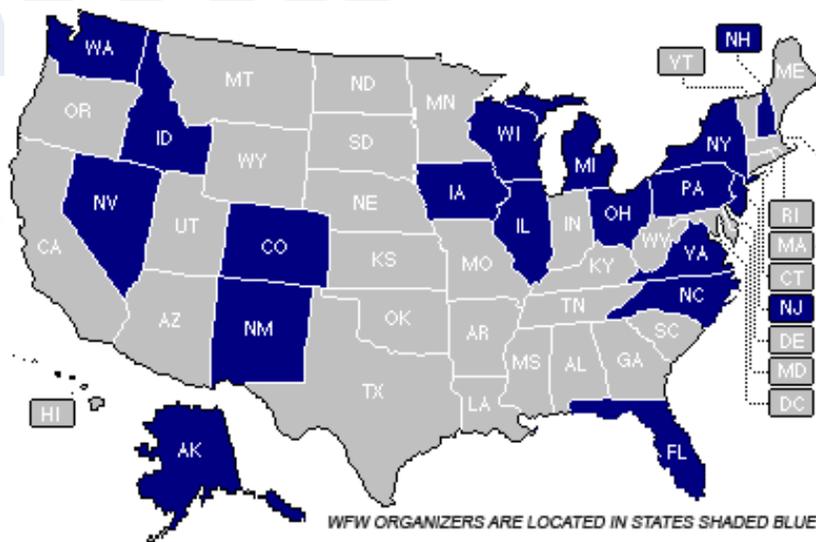
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WORKING FAMILIES WIN (CONTINUED)

ADA's Working Families Win project has quickly put to use the \$1.8 million grant it received earlier this year. More than forty field organizers have been hired to work in targeted states and thousands of volunteers have been trained. Additional staff has been added to the ADA national office to help coordinate the field crews.

in Anchorage to make connections and introduce himself and WFW.

Another Alaska organizer, Kelly Brown, working farther North in Fairbanks, says that a fund raiser for Community Stone Soup made her realize just how much people want to be active and involved.



"It's been an intense year for ADA," said Don Kusler, project director. "It really says something that ADA, with its history of avid liberalism, is working in places we never thought we would be welcome. Communities are so eager to join WFW that our organizers are working around the clock."

Working Families Win (WFW) works to change the economy to favor working people and their families, provides education about economic decisions made in Washington and the impacts within local communities, and engages individuals through neighbor-to-neighbor communication to hold elected officials accountable.

One organizer working in Alaska, Theo Graber, is finding support for WFW issues easier to gather than he had anticipated. In-fighting in the Republican Party and ethics problems for Congressman Young and Senator Stevens are providing an unanticipated window of opportunity to educate voters on the issues. He is working to identify and contact ally organizations and to develop a volunteer network, attending the AFL-CIO Solidarity Picnic

She left the event with six volunteers and house party hosts. Another opportunity appeared when local newspaper, the Daily Newsminer, entitled a story about police breaking up a homeless camp "Herding the Homeless," providing her with the perfect lead-in to introduce WFW to the editorial board. Armed with a letter to the editor from a local volunteer, she met with the board, who promptly denied her request to report more fairly on the issue. Now, she has spoken to the editor about doing an op-ed and has asked a member of the Fairbanks Neighborhood Housing group to work on it with her. She also delivered or e-mailed the latest homeless survey to candidates and news reporters.

In Michigan, where economic woes have reached catastrophic levels, four organizers are leading the way toward recovery. Ryan Hersha, who led a training session at the ADA National Convention, has focused heavily on health care issues, meeting with a nurse in a local hospital who is reaching out to her colleagues. They are committed to fixing a system viewed as broken despite push back from doctors and others. Hersha says that, at his most recent house meeting, he was deeply touched with the

health care stories he heard – all of which came from people with health insurance. He has been gathering "real life in the real economy" stories from area residents to document how widespread the impact of the Bush economy is. He is also bird-dogging candidates on health care issues, a term used by WFW organizers that refers to repeatedly questioning candidates about their positions in public in order to push them to adopt more favorable policies and hold them accountable once they take office.

Jason Bauer, also in Michigan, has been reaching out to small business owners who say they are having a hard time competing with cheaply made foreign goods. Many are conservative, but appear willing to work with WFW to bring the issue to a wider audience. They are working on increasing media attention to the plight of small business owners and successfully published two letters to the editor in the Sunday Oakland Press.

Mike Siegrist, working with Bauer in Michigan, is busy setting up house meetings and developing an activist base. Taking inspiration from the health care forum that Hersha held, he and Bauer are planning one themselves as well as another on energy. Much of the work done is with state based partner organizations like Healthcare for Michigan and ACORN. State Rep. Andy Meisner, a candidate for Oakland County Treasurer has indicated he agrees with the WFW platform and would like to participate in still another forum on foreclosure. Oakland County Commissioner Jim Nash, who is also interested in working with WFW, expressed his commitment to green technology, alternative energy and environmental issues. He and his volunteers sent letters to the editor about Representative Joe Knollenberg's advocacy for drilling in ANWR. With gas prices soaring and jobs disappearing all over Michigan, many in the state are interested in the job creation associated with building green technologies such as wind and solar farms here at home.

Moving to the Midwest, in flood ravaged Iowa, Chris Schwartz and Matt Nappe report WFW issues are more important

## WORKING FAMILIES WIN (CONTINUED)

than ever. They have been very inspired by the huge showing of volunteers who helped with sand-bagging. Never letting an opportunity pass by though, they say that, because of the floods, the need for massive infrastructure investment in most of the communities where WFW is trying to organize is on everyone's mind, and they will begin educating the public on how infrastructure investment can be good for the local economy.

In northern Idaho, organizer Terri Sterling took on local employer, Burger King, for reportedly discriminating against minority employees, customers and other employees who spoke out against the intolerance. Sterling, along with the employees and volunteers, held a demonstration in front of the restaurant, carrying signs and calling for justice. The crowd grew eventually to more than 25 people and attracted the attention of local print and television media. Under pressure, the owner of the Burger King granted a meeting at which an agreement was made to address the claims.

Sterling and her volunteers have taken their case to the community, building coalitions with the anti-racism task force of the Episcopal Church, the local Democratic

Party and with the NezPerce tribal council. They are also preparing fact sheets for voters on the issues faced by low wage earners to use to question candidates who have been going door-to-door.

The Working Families Win project, which has its roots in ADA's fair trade organizing from 2003-2004, is now working in 18 states. The program has conducted nearly 1,000 house meetings during that time resulting in thousands of new community activists and numerous local and federal policy successes for working families.

Over the next few months, WFW organizers and activists will conduct another 600 house meetings, activate over 6,000 community advocates, and educate over 125,000 voters about where candidates and elected officials stand on critical issues such as health care, energy, jobs, and the economy.

This is the kind of people power needed to change the country and ADA is leading the way.

## Wired for Change

[www.adaction.org](http://www.adaction.org)

ADA's website has undergone a total change.

Visit the site and check out our new activist tools.

These are just a few of the stories from the field. Keep reading ADA News and Notes to find out more as the next few months heat up.

If you are not subscribed to ADA News and Notes visit ADA's website, [www.adaction.org](http://www.adaction.org), to sign up.

## ADA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: BRANDIE CONFORTI



Brandie E. Conforti, elected to the ADA national board in June, is currently the Director of Corporate Relations at Partners In Health (PIH) in Boston, Massachusetts.

The mission of PIH is to achieve two overarching goals: to bring the benefits of modern medical science to those most in need of them and to serve as an antidote to despair. Through long-term relationships with collaborating partners, PIH works to promote health and human rights in areas that have been ravaged by political turmoil, poverty, and international neglect. Brandie joined PIH in February to develop and integrate a corporate giving program into PIH's fast growing multi-million dollar budget.

Prior to Partners In Health, Brandie worked at WorldBoston from 2000 - 2007, an organization charged with educating the public about policy matters of national and

international significance. At WorldBoston, Brandie served as the Executive Director from 2002-2007.

She received a BA in Political Science from Holy Cross with a concentration in Middle Eastern studies and she has enjoyed marrying her love of international affairs with her interest in non-profit organizational strategy. In her free time, Brandie is active in her community, maintains an avid interest in politics and seeks excuses to travel as much as possible. She currently resides in Boston, Massachusetts with her husband and their dog Rocky.

"We're thrilled to add Brandie's experience as a non-profit manager and fundraiser to ADA," said ADA National Director Amy Isaacs. "Her expertise in foreign policy and health issues will also enhance our work in those areas."

## MAJOR CHANGES ADOPTED AT 2008 ADA CONVENTION

Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), who was also honored as a “Timeless Liberal” and who will serve as an honorary vice president, sent a congratulatory video.

On Friday delegates were welcomed by President of the National Education Association Reg Weaver, who generously hosted the convention at the NEA facilities. Jim Miller, Executive Director of the Brave New World Foundation, presented short video clips produced by Brave New Films from their Real John McCain series at the annual Newmaker Lunch. The clips are available to watch at their website [www.bravenewfilms.org](http://www.bravenewfilms.org). Mr. Miller discussed the impact videos and viral internet media have on the political process and issue advocacy. Convention business took place in the afternoon and the evening featured a screening of the film, *Body of War*. The film, which many in attendance said was the best film they saw this year, profiled a young Iraq war vet who was paralyzed from wounds sustained in combat.

Saturday morning continued with a lively discussion with Lane Hudson, a blogger with Huffington Post who, in 2006, gained national attention for exposing inappropriate e-mails between Congressman Mark Foley and a teenage House page. Panel discussions later that day included Mapping the Political Landscape, a discussion on the economy and the role of the U.S. in the world Community. Two of ADA’s Working Families Win organizers hosted a lunch at which they demonstrated organizing techniques.

New Leaders for Democratic Action, a group for ADA members under 30, hosted an evening “Beer and Ice Cream” party.

On Sunday two morning plenary sessions had delegates up early. The first, *The Supremes: Challenges in a New Setting*, provided an interesting look into the motivation of President Bush’s Supreme Court appointees and the likely direction the Court will head in the years to come.

At the second session, which focused on Iraq, delegates heard the grim outlook for our continued presence in the conflict but were, by the end, hopeful the next election will produce a change in direction.

Details of two other major events that occurred at this year’s convention are covered in other sections of *ADA Today*: the election of Richard Parker as ADA’s new president and the endorsement of Senator Barack Obama for President. A final piece of business to note, delegates to the convention passed a change to the ADA constitution that allows the organization to hold its membership convention every two years rather than annually.

ADA wishes to thank all those who attended, sponsored, served on panels, gave fascinating speeches, provided entertainment or led policy commissions at the 2008 convention. We particularly want to thank our interns who provided essential staff support.

## ADA SUBMITS TESTIMONY TO DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM COMMITTEE

In mailings going to Democratic convention delegates and alternates, ADA released two reports focusing on issues of concern to working Americans – tax policy and the right of workers to organize free of employer intimidation. Both are of critical concern to voters and, we believe, winning issues for the Democratic Party and its candidates.

In written testimony submitted to the Democratic Platform Committee, ADA also chose to emphasize those issues that most directly affect working people: the right to join a union, worker safety, increasing the minimum wage, education, outsourcing, and access to affordable, quality health care. The reports issued to delegates and ADA members provide additional information on the Employee Free Choice Act and tax policy.

“If Democrats are to earn, maintain, and benefit from the support of the majority of Americans who work for a living, it is then incumbent on us to enact and pledge to administer policies that are in the interest of those same working Americans,” argued Amy Isaacs, ADA National Director, in her testimony.

“The Democratic Party, under the leadership of a unified government led by a duly-elected Obama Administration, must once again lead the way towards fulfillment of the American Dream, one where the rights of every single American are again equal to the privilege and opportunity now accorded the wealthiest of our corporate citizens, where every child has an equivalent chance for success as we provide those companies now deemed ‘too big to fail.’”

“If we once again would have our country be a beacon of hope in a dangerously undemocratic world, if we would live lives that exemplify the values of fairness and equality that are embodied in the Constitution of the United States, if we would once again inspire generations to an active belief and participation in a government of, by, and FOR the American people, then we must legislate and fairly administer a government that balances the best interest of the future with the requirements of the present. We cannot continue to collect taxes from families on Maple Avenue and use the money to rescue outsized businesses on Wall Street at a time when the policies of our government undermine the very ability of American families to prosper in a growing

economy. The chief financial officer in every American family understands this. That is why the survival of the Democratic Party demands a clear articulation of national policies and practices that support American workers, which protect our elderly and nurture our youth, which foster our ideals and encourage the values that unite us as Americans.

“The American people are not stupid. They will not forever support a political party or a government that consistently does not advocate in their interest. Americans for Democratic Action contends that our survival as a viable political party, and ultimately as a democratic government depends on the collective advance of the interests of all members of the American family.

“For this reason we believe that the above-listed principles are the bedrock of democracy and should constitute the foundation of the Party’s platform.”

You can read the full text of ADA’s testimony and download the two papers referred to above at ADA’s new website, [www.adaction.org](http://www.adaction.org).

ADA ELECTS GALBRAITH BIOGRAPHER, RICHARD PARKER, PRESIDENT

Delegates to the 2008 National Convention elected Richard Parker, Harvard professor and biographer of ADA founder John Kenneth Galbraith, president of Americans for Democratic Action.

Professor Parker is Lecturer in Public Policy and Senior Fellow of the Shorenstein Center at Harvard's Kennedy School. An economist by training, he is a graduate of Dartmouth College and Oxford University. He has worked as an economist for the UNDP, as cofounder of Mother Jones Magazine, and as head of his own consulting firm, serving Congressional clients, including Senators Kennedy, Glenn, Cranston, and McGovern, among others. His books include: *The Myth of the Middle Class*, a study of U.S. income distribution; *Mixed Signals: The Future of Global Television News*; and the intellectual biography, *John Kenneth Galbraith: His Life, His Politics, His Economics*.

"We are delighted to have Richard at the helm," said ADA National Director Amy Isaacs. "His appreciation for the history of ADA and our founding principles combined with his vast experience in modern communication makes him the perfect leader for ADA in the 21st Century."

The following interview with Richard Parker took place July 3rd.

**You are the 26th president of ADA. Past presidents include Vice President Hubert Humphrey, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., John Kenneth Galbraith, and Representatives Patsy T. Mink, Barney Frank, Charles Rangel, and civil rights hero Congressman John Lewis. You have a good sense of humor so I know you won't be offended when I say - those are big shoes to fill!**

[Laughing] I think this is what they said about Harry Truman stepping into the shoes of Franklin Roosevelt. If I do things right with ADA, I'm looking forward to growing right along with it just as ADA grew in the era of Harry Truman. They are enormous shoes to fill, I have no question about that, I'm Ken Galbraith's biographer and I spent a good deal of time talking with Ken about ADA and the importance both of his life and also American liberalism's life and the

country's life. Most of all I'm honored to be the new president. I know ADA is not the same ADA that was born with Ken's and with Eleanor Roosevelt's and Arthur Schlesinger's and Reinhold Niebur's help 61 years ago, but I'm looking forward to helping it move into a new century. I was born the same year that ADA was born and I'm telling myself that 60 is the new 40.

**Past presidents have had different goals. Some saw themselves as figureheads, others were hands on leaders. Where do you see yourself along those lines?**

I'm going to lean toward hands on but I'm also going to try and encourage hands on leadership from within, from the staff, the executive committee, the board and the membership. As we head into a new century looking toward traditional kinds of top down, old fashion, white male leadership is probably not the model that is going to work best in a complex society like ours. And while I'm an old white male, it's time for me to learn some new tricks and time for ADA to learn the new tricks of building coalition leadership that involves as many people as possible.

**As a professor at Harvard and the father of a ten and fifteen year old, you are around young people every day. Is ADA a place for young people?**

ADA has not been as much a place for young people as it could be. Quite honestly when I first decided to take this job a number of my friends said, "ADA? Is that still in existence?" and others rather more sarcastically referred to us as the left wing of the AARP. My goal is that we're going to build a powerful and very active youth movement and also create a lot of room for 40 and 50-somethings who haven't been quite as active as I would like them to be.

**You noted ADA celebrated its 60th anniversary last year. What's next for us?**

We are in a period of trying to figure out what liberalism is going to be for the next 60 years. Liberalism arose in

several stages. There's an 18th century stage of individual rights and the idea of creating a new kind of democratic nation state that would supercede monarchy and mercantilism. In the 19th Century, a lot of liberalism involved the idea of securing property rights for a burgeoning middle class and placed it all too often in conflict with more social democratic and socialist movements. The 20th Century experience with liberalism, particularly in the United States, has been one epitomized by the successes of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. A period when government was growing in terms of its responsibilities and the protection and security it was

extending to citizens particularly in the eye teeth of the worst economic depression in the nation's history. We're in a period now where the average incomes of American families are higher than it was in the 1930s. I don't want to belittle or demean the issue of poverty in the United States but I think that we're going to have to tackle a combination of issues economically that involve finding ways to address the carrying capacity limits of the planet, the carbon footprint that we create, the consumption levels at which we operate that are going to call on liberalism to create a new balance of freedom and security. We've been through a thirty year long period where conservatives, in the name of freedom, have actually generated more insecurity, more inequality and more unhappiness for more people than at any time during the height of liberalism in the mid-twentieth century. We need to move to secure economic well-being for not only the vast majority of Americans but also in a way that doesn't define economic security as simply the consumption of more and more. So that's one set of delicate balances.

The other is a foreign policy balance that recognizes the Cold War is over in a way that our conservative competitors would like to believe it is not but rather we simply discovered a new enemy to take the place of "godless communism". I think that we have an opportunity with the Obama presidency to help, as an organization, define what that new global vision of American liberalism is going to be. How

"Sixty is the new forty"

## MORE WITH RICHARD PARKER

to incorporate it into more multilateralism and less use of arms as a first reaction to the threat and to have a more judicious sense of cooperation that builds not just on the opportunities for free trade but for a kind of fair trade regime that expands the rights and well being of billions of people beyond American borders.

**You mention being the biographer of Ken Galbraith who was one of our founders. How do you think he saw liberalism and did he think we were making progress?**

Ken had a wicked sense of humor and a couple of years ago he said to me, "Richard the prospects for liberalism don't look good in my lifetime but at my age that's not an adverse comment on liberalism." That was the immediate period after the Iraq war and, by every measure, he was quite concerned about the future of liberalism. Since his death, we have seen the emergence of real new possibilities for liberalism on the wreckage of failed conservative foreign policy and economic policy. Nobody can offer guarantees but we've got an enormous opportunity to not only win the White House but vastly expand the majorities of Democrats in Congress that are going to be in many cases strongly liberal. Therefore we're going to have an opportunity to try to create the new liberalism for the 21st Century. One

of the things Ken always insisted was that too often liberalism got too comfortable with the old agendas and the old regimes and the duty of liberals within ADA and out was to constantly be looking for ways to update liberalism for the challenges of the present and the future.

**Part of ADA's mission is to educate the public about the issues through the media. In the past that's always meant newspapers and major network television news but today some of the best sources for news come from blogs, e-zines and shows like The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. You co-founded Mother Jones Magazine and have contributed articles to the New York Times, Washington Post, New Republic, and Atlantic Monthly. Do you think working with traditional media should remain part of ADA's core mission?**

I don't think it's an either/or choice. We have to learn how to work across the full spectrum of communications with larger audiences. There is an enormous revolution going on with the rise of the so called alternative media. I point not only to my Mother Jones experience but to the fact that I'm also the founder of a major west coast alternative newspaper in Santa Barbara, CA, The Independent, which has even today a 50,000 circulation and my

service on the board of the Association of Alternative Newspapers over the years. For a 61 year old, I'm reasonably well acquainted with alternative media. I'm hoping that during my presidency at ADA we're going to go a lot further in using things like blogs and websites that build on attracting a new generation to extend ADA's reach and profile for so many people who haven't heard of us or know about our legacy of achievement.

**Is there anything else that you'd like to impart to ADA members or readers of ADA Today?**

I think the key is that I want to see this organization rebuilt. I want it to grow in membership, I want it to grow in revenue and I want it to grow in influence. I think that its strength is its maturity, I think that's not a liability but a strength that we need to play to. Our connections to so many liberal or progressive Members of Congress and with political figures across the United States makes us an ideal forum and convening grounds for many of the new groups that are just coming on the scene as internet or web based organizations. Our ability to bring together people of different generations and different backgrounds is one of our strengths and its something I'm going to be building on over the next two years.



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